

Joshua Ofodile, AR – 2024

There is simply too much good to say about USSYP that I could ramble on for hours. However, the lessons I learned for speakers, Military Mentors, and delegates alike are what makes the program so incredible. It seemed as if every day was more informative than the last in terms of both professional and personal development.

From personally asking the Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg a question to hearing my own Military Mentor's story of overcoming adversity in his life, the vast reservoirs of lessons and knowledge I had access to during Washington Week was unparalleled to anything I had ever come across before, and I would encourage any future delegates to take advantage this experience to truly learn from those inspiring leaders who have come before us.

While the experiences with the speakers and Military Mentors were some of the most impactful for me during Washington Week, I feel like it truly is the delegates that make this program remarkable. Going into the week I was scared of the types of people I would encounter, worried about finding my fit amongst the 100 other brilliant, accomplished students. However, upon leaving the last day I had tears in my eyes because I realized I was leaving behind a newfound family, 104 members strong. Despite only spending a week with what were strangers only a few days before, I forged what I hope will be lifetime bonds. From intellectual conversations spanning numerous topics to singing a USSYP-themed parody of a song from the Hamilton musical, the delegates shaped my week, and I'm sure we would all say the same.

Watching the USSYP recap on the last night surrounded by close friends was an experience I wish I could relive. Laughing and joking over all the memories we made while simultaneously crying because we would soon be heading back to our respective states was cathartic, to say the least. Singing Country Roads huddled up in the basement of the Mayflower, I had a moment to take it all in. The glory and downfall of Coach 3, the incredibly delicious food, and the 104 gawking faces made whenever seeing a new speaker; all of these things are part of what makes USSYP amazing. Although no other Washington Week will be exactly like ours, I think that makes the program even better, for every year it consistently gives 104 of the nation's brightest young leaders a new, different perspective on their career goals, personal goals, and perhaps even life itself.

Although I was sad to leave Washington, D.C. and Washington Week behind, I can look excitedly to the future because I know I will carry everything I learned from that week with me wherever I go. Because I know that the future U.S. government will be in great hands if led by the leaders and changemakers who participated in the program with me. Because I know that the culmination of Washington Week was certainly not the end, but rather the beginning of a new chapter in which I suddenly gained 103 new family members.

To all future USSYP delegates. It doesn't matter how much you think you know, there is always more to be learned. That is why I implore you to treat USSYP as more than just an opportunity to meet many super-powerful people and see monuments, but rather as a learning opportunity. Something that will stick with you for the foreseeable future. USSYP truly is a week that can change a lifetime.